



COMMITTEE of the WHOLE

CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES
January 14, 2008
5:00 P.M.
Council Office

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

D. Sterner, J. Waltman, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, M. Baez, V. Spencer

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:

T. McMahon, C. Younger, L. Churchill, C. Kanezo L. Kelleher, R. Hottenstein, D. Vind, C. Jones

Vaughn Spencer, President of Council, called the Committee of the Whole meeting to order at 5:00p.m.

I. Bond Debt Unwinding

Mr. Vind reported regulations governing the proposed debt unwinding would require Council approve the action by the end of January. Satisfying the deadline calls for the introduction of an ordinance. Once the ordinance is approved, the process to unwind the 5.5 million in debt service reserves can begin. Mr. Spencer inquired if any members objected to amending the 01/14/08 meeting agenda to include the proposed ordinance.

The members of Council present agreed to amend the agenda. Mr. Vind thanked Council and offered to meet with those members not in attendance, at times and locations convenient to them, to discuss the ordinance and the proposed transaction.

II. Interview with John Hefferon (Appointment- Disruptive Conduct Review Board)

Mr. Hefferon thanked the members of City Council for allowing him an opportunity to meet and discuss his interest in serving on the Disruptive Conduct Review Board. Mr. Hefferon stated that he was new to the property owning and managing business but has found it to be a rewarding experience.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz asked Mr. Hefferon to describe the types of activities he is involved in. Mr. Hefferon remarked that, as a resident of Philadelphia, he was actively involved in community and neighborhood affairs. Mr. Hefferon described various sports clubs and youth activity programs he managed; he noted his efforts to promote community awareness amongst his tenants.

Ms. Baez inquired where Mr. Hefferon resided. Mr. Hefferon stated he lives in Lititz, though he previously worked in Reading – for the Post Office – and is familiar with the City. Ms. Baez further questioned if Mr. Hefferon managed his own properties or employed a local property manager. Mr. Hefferon stated he personally managed his properties. Each tenant is in possession of a cell number and is free to make contact at any time. Mr. Hefferon commented that his position in the Post Office Administration and the willingness his superior permits a flexible schedule. Mr. Churchill commented that the board meets on an as needed basis. Mr. Churchill stated that information garnered from Allentown suggests meetings will be infrequent.

Mr. Hefferon asked a series of questions related to local revitalization and economic development efforts; he concluded by remarking on the great diversity and opportunity that can be found in Reading.

The members of Council thanked Mr. Hefferon for his time and indicated that he would be contacted when a decision was made.

After Mr. Hefferon departed the members of Council and Mr. Churchill discussed the appointment. Ms. Baez remarked that she was uncomfortable appointing Mr. Hefferon, as he was not a resident and failed to have a property manager, which is in violation of City ordinance. Mr. Sterner suggested that this was an issue but shouldn't disqualify Mr. Hefferon from serving. Mr. Churchill agreed with Mr. Sterner. After some additional discussion unanimous agreement was reached to appoint Mr. Hefferon to the Disruptive Conduct Review Board.

III. Committee Structure and VP Selection

Mr. Spencer requested delaying the VP selection, due to the absence of Councilors Fuhs, Marmarou and Waltman. All agreed with this request and decided to revisit the topic at the next Committee of the Whole meeting.

Mr. Spencer inquired if any thought had been given to committee organization. Mr. Spencer remarked that one suggestion forwarded by Ms. Kelleher was to improve upon the existing Administrative Oversight Committee. Ms. Kelleher explained how the Administrative Oversight Committee is primarily focused on interviewing BAC candidates. As this function seldom requires the full amount of time allocated to the committee, new uses could be explored. Ms. Kelleher recommended Council consider developing a Land Use Committee. This committee could weigh in on policy and closely monitor the Zoning Hearing Board and Planning Commission agendas for items that might be of interest to Council.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz remarked that such a committee is important and that the Administrative Oversight Committee would be the appropriate place to serve the

function. Mr. Sterner agreed with Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz and expressed reluctance to drastically reforming the existing committee structure. Mr. Spencer agreed that the existing committee structure was well suited to the schedules and demands of City Council. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz agreed and commented that City Council operates far better when compared to similar organizations she has served with.

It was agreed to consider trial adjustments to the existing committee structure. Mr. Spencer requested individual Councilors forward any recommendations along to Ms. Kelleher.

IV. Sewer Main Break

Mr. Jones reported the recent sewer main break has affected those portions of the City served by the 6th and Canal pump station. The main break was due to the age of the pipe and not as a result of negligence. From the time the break was identified to the time the repair was made, approximately 20 million gallons discharged into the Schuylkill River. Mr. Jones emphasized that the discharge amount, when viewed against the total volume of the river, is small.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned if environmental contamination has resulted from the discharge. Mr. Jones stated testing indicated the quality of the river had not been affected; however, environmental impact notices were issued per DEP regulations.

Mr. Jones discussed the complex repair operations, the large number of man hours invested in making the repair and the quality and dedication of the staff. Mr. Jones noted the entire replacement operation took nearly 72 hours to complete. The total cost of the project is not yet known. Mr. Spencer questioned if the sewer fund would be able to absorb the repair costs. Mr. Jones stated funds are budgeted to cover maintenance costs; however, the size of the repair could possibly utilize the entire year's budget.

V. Agenda Review

Mr. Younger requested Council adopt a resolution authorizing a request to the Berks County Tax Claim bureau to refrain from managing delinquent taxes. Mr. Younger explained case law could allow the bureau to stake claim to 5% of collected back taxes. The City currently employs Portnoff and Associates to manage delinquent tax collection. Portnoff is able to assess fees, in addition to the tax owed, and expedite the collection process.

Mr. Churchill reviewed the final terms of the new AFSCME contract; he reported that the membership of AFSCME voted in favor of the new contract. The greatest adjustment in the contract was the 3.25% per year raise. Mr. Churchill explained that this figure was agreed to by the Administration due to the Union's willingness to pay more for insurance.

There was a discussion concerning the waste water treatment plant design and construction RFP. Mr. Spencer requested an explanation as to how only one firm, out

of four initial respondents, answered the RFP. Due to the limited time it was agreed to revisit the issue during committee meetings on Tuesday, January 22nd.

Mr. Spencer reviewed the number of ordinances for introduction and noted that an additional ordinance to unwind exiting Bond debt would be added for introduction.

The Committee of the Whole adjourned at 7:10p.m.

Respectfully Submitted

By: _____
Linda A. Kelleher, City Clerk